## United States Bankruptcy Court Central District of California Los Angeles Judge Robert Kwan, Presiding Courtroom 1675 Calendar

Thursday, January 6, 2022

**Hearing Room** 

1675

10:00 AM 2:00-0000

Chapter

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Docket 0

**Tentative Ruling:** 

- NONE LISTED -

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2:13-14135 Art and Architecture Books of the 21st Century and 400 S.

Chapter 11

#1.00 TRIAL RE: to resolve disputed issues of material fact on the plan's agent's motion to show cause

fr. 12/15/21

Docket 2676

### **Tentative Ruling:**

Updated tentative ruling as of 1/5/22. Sustain objections of Douglas Chrismas to the declaration of Victor Sahn on grounds of best evidence and as argumentative. The Sahn declaration is not objectionable on grounds of lack of disclosure because it is filed in substantial compliance with the trial scheduling order of 12/15/21 as the witness was disclosed by the filing of his declaration before the 12/24/21 deadline. The substance of the declaration, however, is objectionable as disguised legal argument in interpreting certain documents filed in this bankruptcy case, which presents best evidence and argumentative issues. The court will consider the Sahn declaration as further legal argument on behalf of the plan agent, and will take judicial notice of the documents filed in the case as identified in the declaration. However, the testimony in the declaration is inadmissible as substantive evidence, and there will be no live cross or redirect examination of the witness permitted.

Regarding the merits, it appears that the gist of the argument of Douglas Chrismas is that he never transferred ownership of the pre-1999 (i.e., preformation) posters to the debtor, stating in his declaration that there is no written documentation that he or his other companies transferred the posters to the debtor and his representations in the valuation declaration filed in support of debtor's adequate protection motion in this case was not "sufficiently explained" (i.e., mistaken).

It appears that the gist of the argument of the plan agent that the debtor owns the pre-1999 posters is based on admissions of Chrismas in statements made in documents filed in this bankruptcy case (i.e., the valuation declaration, the bankruptcy schedules, plan confirmation documents) that constitute judicial estoppel or judicial admissions that debtor owns the posters. In the court's

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view, the evidentiary record is insufficient as to how debtor came to own the posters as there is no documentary evidence showing debtor's acquisition through purchase or otherwise. It appears that there is no dispute that the posters were owned by Chrismas or his other companies, who first acquired the posters, and that the plan agent is asking the court to find that he transferred the posters to the debtor, possibly as a capital contribution or a gift. If debtor acquired the posters from Chrismas, there must have been some transfer by him to the debtor. Chrismas's position is that there was no such transfer. Is it the plan agent's position that the transfer was some kind of gift as inferred by the circumstances, including Chrismas's admissions in his statements and acts. See, e.g., Skellinger v. England, 81 Cal.App. 176, 253 P. 191 (1927). It seems to the court that the plan agent will have to show that there was a transfer by some means from Chrismas to the debtor.

At trial, the court will receive live testimony from the plan agent and Chrismas, who are subject to cross-examination.

Appearances are required on 1/6/22, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Prior tentative ruling as of 1/3/22. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 1/6/22, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Revised tentative ruling as of 12/15/21. After considering the moving and opposing papers, the court's tentative view is that application of the doctrines of judicial estoppel and judicial admission is problematic here because the party to the prior proceedings was not Chrismas in his individual capacity, but the debtor. The court and the plan agent in discussing the matter in prior hearings have apparently conflated Chrismas as debtor's representative and Chrismas in his individual capacity, which was perhaps understandable because Chrismas was the 100 percent shareholder and president of the debtor and his interests were aligned with the debtor in the preconfirmation phase of this case. Judicial estoppel applies to a party prevailing in a prior proceeding and taking advantage of a contrary position in a subsequent

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proceeding, see generally 1 Russell, Bankruptcy Evidence Manual, §6:1 (2019-2020 edition), but in this situation, the parties are different. The debtor was the party in the prior matter of the adequate protection motion, and Chrismas in his individual capacity is the party in the adversary proceeding and in the contested matter of the plan agent's contempt motion. The court also preliminarily stated its tentative view that judicial estoppel was not applicable because the debtor/Chrismas did not prevail on the adequate protection motion because the favorable ruling by this court on that matter was reversed on appeal, so there is no apparently inconsistent result to warrant the potential application of judicial estoppel, strictly speaking. See 1 Russell, Bankruptcy Evidence Manual, §6:1, citing and quoting inter alia, Moore v. United Services Auto. Ass'n, 808 F.2d 1147, 1153 (5th Cir. 1987) ("The judicial estoppel doctrine requires 'an affirmative position to have been taken by the party to be estopped and requires that the position to have been successfully maintained."). Whether or not the court has construed judicial estoppel too strictly may be a matter of controversy because parties in whatever capacity should not make contradictory statements based on what is to their advantage at a particular time in the case.

There are differences between judicial estoppel, judicial admission and evidentiary admission. See Minish v. Hanuman Fellowship, 214 Cal.App.4<sup>th</sup> 437, 448-459 (2013). The statements made in the Chrismas's declaration in support of the debtor's adequate protection motion were made on behalf of the debtor, which was the party to the prior matter in this case, and not Chrismas individually, and thus, may not be a judicial admission by him as the party in the prior proceeding. Whether or not the admissions made in the adequate protection motion or the bankruptcy schedules are considered made in a pleading may also be a subject of controversy because generally speaking, pleadings consist of a complaint, answer or other response to the complaint and pretrial statements. See Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 7. As to bankruptcy schedules, it is an open question in the Ninth Circuit whether or not the doctrine of judicial admissions applies to bankruptcy schedules. See In re Barker, 839 F.3d 1189, 1195 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2016). Thus, the court has doubts about the applicability of the doctrine of judicial admission here.

However, Chrismas's statements in debtor's filings in this case are evidentiary

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admissions because in whatever capacity, the statements were made against his interest in his individual capacity, that is, the posters were owned by the debtor, and not him. Nevertheless, as recognized in the case law, a party against whom an evidentiary admission is asserted has the right to show that the prior statements were inadvertently made or by mistake. Minish v. Hanuman Fellowship, 214 Cal.App.4th at 457. Accordingly, the court finds that it is proper for Chrismas to have the opportunity in a contested evidentiary hearing to show that his prior evidentiary admissions were inadvertently made or mistaken. Thus, there appears to be a genuine factual issue regarding whether the prior admissions or the declaration assertions are the truth, which would necessitate an evidentiary hearing. Chrismas asserts that the dispute regarding ownership of the posters should be resolved in the pending adversary proceeding, while the plan agent asserts that the court may summarily dismiss Chrismas's statements without an evidentiary hearing and grant him declaratory relief that the debtor owns the posters. Given that the posters may be valuable as Chrismas had attested in the adequate protection motion declaration that they were worth \$13 million, the court is not inclined to determine ownership without an evidentiary hearing because of due process concerns. See Tyner v. Nicholson (In re Nicholson), 435 B.R. 622, 635-637 (9th Cir. BAP 2010), abrogated on other grounds as recognized in In re Tea Station Investment, Inc., No. 2:20-bk-14175 NB, 2021 WL 4988436 at \*4 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. Oct. 26, 2021). As stated by the Bankruptcy Appellate Panel in In re Nicholson, "An evidentiary hearing is generally appropriate when there are disputed and material factual issues that the bankruptcy court cannot readily determine from the record. Thus, if a contested matter in a bankruptcy case 'cannot be decided without resolving a disputed material issue of fact, an evidentiary hearing must be held at which testimony of witnesses is taken in the same manner as testimony is taken in an adversary proceeding or at trial in a district court civil case.' Fed. R. Bankr.P. 9014, Advisory Committee Note to 2002 Amendment. This advisory committee note 'makes clear that this requirement is intended to require a trial when there is a genuine factual dispute." 435 B.R. at 636 (citation omitted).

Moreover, the court needs to resolve whether or not it may grant declaratory relief over ownership as part of the civil contempt proceedings instead of resolving ownership in the claims in the adversary proceeding. If so, the court

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would set an evidentiary hearing to resolve the contempt motion. Chrismas's counterclaims for ownership of the posters for conversion, replevin and declaratory relief are noncore state law claims and require entry of final judgment by the district court as he has not consented to this court's jurisdiction to enter a final judgment. See Executive Benefits Insurance Agency v. Arkison, 573 U.S. 25, 34 (2014).

It seems that the court can treat the posters dispute as a discrete litigation matter like the Banksy dispute and conduct a trial on that dispute. Discovery in the adversary proceeding involving Chrismas's claims is now closed, and the factual evidence appears to be straightforward. The plan agent does not assert that discovery is needed as he contends that the matter can be decided on the papers. Chrismas apparently relies on his testimony that he never transferred ownership of the posters to the debtor as he asserted in his declaration. In any event, the adversary proceeding, including Chrismas's counterclaims, has been pending for years, and discovery is closed. The court could just set an expeditious evidentiary hearing since the factual issues appear to be straightforward. The court would dispense with a pretrial conference on the matter as there is no apparent need. The court would require the parties to file their witness and exhibit lists and optional trial briefs in advance of the trial. The trial could be scheduled as early as January 2022. Alternatively, the parties may waive the conduct of an evidentiary hearing and have the court decide the matter consisting of the plan agent's motion and Chrismas's counterclaims. However, it appears to the court that while the plan agent will waive an evidentiary hearing, Chrismas will not. The court will set a further status conference on 1/5/22 at 11:00 a.m. so the parties can confer on a date for the trial of this matter.

Appearances are required on 12/15/21 to discuss setting of an evidentiary hearing as appropriate, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

#### **Party Information**

#### **Debtor(s):**

Art and Architecture Books of the

Represented By

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Thomas M Geher David W. Meadows Jerome S Cohen Carolyn A Dye Alan I Nahmias

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### 2:13-14135 Art and Architecture Books of the 21st Century and 400 S.

Chapter 11

- **#2.00** TRIAL RE: Motion of Sam Leslie as plan agent under confirmed plan of reorganization for:
  - (1) issuance of order to show cause for contempt against Douglas Chrismas, an individual;
  - (2) to compel Douglas Chrismas to issue correspondence retracting letter dated October 27, 2021 addressed to Mr. Jeff Tanenbaum of Threesixty Asset Advisors as well as contents of October 27, 2021 email from Jonathan Shenson, Esq. to Carolyn A. Dye, Esq. and Victor A Sahn, Esq.; or in the alternative;
  - (3) for order interpreting and enforcing terms and conditions of confirmation order on confirmed plan of reorganization of Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors; and
  - (4) for sanctions against Douglas Chrismas, individually including monetary sanctions
  - fr. 11-23-21, 12/15/21

Docket 2661

### **Tentative Ruling:**

Updated tentative ruling as of 1/5/22. See tentative ruling for matter no. 1.

Prior tentative ruling as of 1/3/22. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 1/6/22, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Prior tentative ruling as of 12/15/21. See tentative ruling for matter no. 3.

Prior tentative ruling as of 12/9/21. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 12/15/21 to discuss setting of an evidentiary hearing as appropriate, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear

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through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Prior tentative ruling as of 11/10/21. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 11/23/21, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

### **Party Information**

### **Debtor(s):**

Art and Architecture Books of the Represented By

Thomas M Geher David W. Meadows Jerome S Cohen Carolyn A Dye Alan I Nahmias

### **Movant(s):**

Sam Leslie, Plan Agent Represented By

Victor A Sahn Asa S Hami Carolyn A Dye David J Richardson Steven Thomas Stephen Sorensen

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#3.00 TRIAL RE: order to show cause why Douglas Chrismas should not be held in contempt of court for violations of the "order confirming second amended plan of reorganization of official committee of unsecured creditors" fr. 11-23-21, 12/15/21

Docket 2665

## **Tentative Ruling:**

Updated tentative ruling as of 1/5/22. See tentative ruling for matter no. 1.

Prior tentative ruling as of 1/3/22. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 1/6/22, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Prior tentative ruling as of 12/15/21. See tentative ruling for matter no. 3.

Prior tentative ruling as of 12/9/21. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 12/15/21 to discuss setting of an evidentiary hearing as appropriate, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Prior tentative ruling as of 11/10/21. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 11/23/21, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

#### **Party Information**

#### **Debtor(s):**

Art and Architecture Books of the

Represented By Thomas M Geher David W. Meadows

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Jerome S Cohen Carolyn A Dye Alan I Nahmias

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Chapter 11

Adv#: 2:15-01679 THE OFFICIAL COMMITTEE OF UNSECURED CREDITORS OF T v.

**#4.00** TRIAL RE: First amended counter-complaint against Art & Architecture Books of the 21st Century

Docket 640

## **Tentative Ruling:**

Updated tentative ruling as of 1/5/22. See tentative ruling for matter no. 1.

Prior tentative ruling as of 1/3/22. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 1/6/22, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

### **Party Information**

#### **Debtor(s):**

Art and Architecture Books of the Represented By

Thomas M Geher David W. Meadows Jerome S Cohen Carolyn A Dye Alan I Nahmias

**Defendant(s):** 

Ace Gallery New York Corporation, Represented By

Alan W Forsley

Douglas Chrismas Represented By

Jonathan Seligmann Shenson

Ace Gallery New York, Inc., a Represented By

Alan W Forsley

ACE MUSEUM, a California Represented By

Alan W Forsley

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## Los Angeles

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g Room 1675 10:00 AM CONT... Art and Architecture Books of the 21st Century Chapter 11 400 S La Brea, LLC a California Represented By Michael W Vivoli Ronald Rus Fahim Farivar Brian L Davidoff Keith Patrick Banner Jennifer Kellen Represented By J. Bennett Friedman Michael D. Smith Represented By Brian L Davidoff Keith Patrick Banner Kamran Gharibian Represented By Brian L Davidoff Keith Patrick Banner Daryoush Dayan Represented By Brian L Davidoff Keith Patrick Banner Cathay Bank, a California Represented By Ekwan E Rhow Elliot C Harvey Schatmeier Jennifer Kellen Represented By Michael D Sobkowiak **Plaintiff(s):** THE OFFICIAL COMMITTEE OF Represented By Victor A Sahn Daniel A Lev

Official Committee Of Unsecured Represented By

David J Richardson Victor A Sahn

David J Richardson

Asa S Hami Jessica Vogel

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**Chapter 11** 

Sam Leslie

Represented By
Victor A Sahn
Carolyn A Dye
David J Richardson
Jason Balitzer
Steven Thomas
Stephen Sorensen

Judge Robert Kwan, Presiding Courtroom 1675 Calendar

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1<u>0:00 AM</u>

2:13-14135 Art and Architecture Books of the 21st Century

Chapter 11

Adv#: 2:15-01679 THE OFFICIAL COMMITTEE OF UNSECURED CREDITORS OF T v.

#5.00 Status conference re: First amended counter-complaint against Art & Architecture Books of the 21st Century fr. 1-5-22

Docket 640

## **Tentative Ruling:**

Revised tentative ruling as of 1/5/22. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 1/6/22, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Prior tentative ruling as of 1/3/22 at 7:00 p.m. Off calendar. In the interests of judicial economy, the court continues the status conference on its own motion to the date and time of the trial of the claims relating to disputed art posters on 1/6/22 at 10:00 a.m. No appearances are required on 1/5/22.

### **Party Information**

### **Debtor(s)**:

Art and Architecture Books of the Represented By

Thomas M Geher David W. Meadows Jerome S Cohen Carolyn A Dye Alan I Nahmias

### **Defendant(s):**

Ace Gallery New York Corporation, Represented By

Alan W Forsley

Douglas Chrismas Represented By

Jonathan Seligmann Shenson

Ace Gallery New York, Inc., a Represented By

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ACE	E MUSEUM, a California	Represented By Alan W Forsley		
400	S La Brea, LLC a California	Represented By Michael W Vivoli Ronald Rus Fahim Farivar Brian L Davidoff Keith Patrick Banner		
Jenn	ifer Kellen	Represented By J. Bennett Friedman		
Mich	hael D. Smith	Represented By Brian L Davidoff Keith Patrick Banner		
Kam	nran Gharibian	Represented By Brian L Davidoff Keith Patrick Banner		
Dary	oush Dayan	Represented By Brian L Davidoff Keith Patrick Banner		
Cath	ay Bank, a California	Represented By Ekwan E Rhow Elliot C Harvey Schatn	neier	
Jenn	ifer Kellen	Represented By Michael D Sobkowiak		

**Plaintiff(s):** 

THE OFFICIAL COMMITTEE OF Represented By

Victor A Sahn Daniel A Lev

David J Richardson

Asa S Hami

Los Angeles

Judge Robert Kwan, Presiding Courtroom 1675 Calendar

Thursday, J	January 6, 2022	Hearing Room	1675
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Jessica Vogel

Official Committee Of Unsecured Represented By

David J Richardson Victor A Sahn

Sam Leslie Represented By

Victor A Sahn
Carolyn A Dye
David J Richardson
Jason Balitzer
Steven Thomas
Stephen Sorensen

Judge Robert Kwan, Presiding Courtroom 1675 Calendar

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Chapter 11

#6.00

Cont'd status conference re: Post confirmation of plan fr. 9/16/20, 3/17/21, 12/15/21, 1-5-22

Docket 1

## **Tentative Ruling:**

Revised tentative ruling as of 1/5/22. The court has reviewed the plan agent's updated status report and creditor Douglas Chrismas's statement in response thereto. No tentative ruling on the merits. The court will call the status conference first on the 10:00 a.m. hearing calendar. Appearances are required on 1/6/22, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Prior tentative ruling as of 1/3/22 at 7:00 p.m. Off calendar. The court has reviewed the plan agent's status report of 12/30/21 and creditor Douglas Chrismas's statement thereon of 1/3/22. In the interests of judicial economy, the court continues the status conference on its own motion to the date and time of the trial of related matters between the plan agent and Chrismas on 1/6/22 at 10:00 a.m. The court expects that the status conference in the main case will be called promptly at 10:00 a.m., and the trial of the related matters will start within 30 minutes, on or before 10:30 a.m. No appearances are required on 1/5/22.

Prior tentative ruling as of 12/9/21. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 12/15/21, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Prior tentative ruling as of 3/15/21. The court has reviewed the plan agent's status report filed on 3/15/21. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 3/17/21, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

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**CONT...** Art and Architecture Books of the 21st Century

Chapter 11

**Party Information** 

### **Debtor(s):**

Art and Architecture Books of the

Represented By
Thomas M Geher
David W. Meadows
Jerome S Cohen
Carolyn A Dye

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### 2:13-14135 Art and Architecture Books of the 21st Century and 400 S.

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- **#7.00** Status conference re: Motion of Sam Leslie as plan agent under confirmed plan of reorganization for:
  - (1) issuance of order to show cause for contempt against Douglas Chrismas, an individual;
  - (2) to compel Douglas Chrismas to issue correspondence retracting letter dated October 27, 2021 addressed to Mr. Jeff Tanenbaum of Threesixty Asset Advisors as well as contents of October 27, 2021 email from Jonathan Shenson, Esq. to Carolyn A. Dye, Esq. and Victor A Sahn, Esq.; or in the alternative;
  - (3) for order interpreting and enforcing terms and conditions of confirmation order on confirmed plan of reorganization of Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors; and
  - (4) for sanctions against Douglas Chrismas, individually including monetary sanctions
  - fr. 11-23-21, 1-5-22

Docket 2661

### **Tentative Ruling:**

Revised tentative ruling as of 1/5/22. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 1/6/22, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

Prior tentative ruling as of 1/3/22 at 7:00 p.m. Off calendar. In the interests of judicial economy, the court continues the status conference on its own motion to the date and time of the trial of this contested matter on 1/6/22 at 10:00 a.m. No appearances are required on 1/5/22.

Prior tentative ruling as of 12/9/21. No tentative ruling on the merits. Appearances are required on 12/15/21 to discuss setting of an evidentiary

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hearing as appropriate, but counsel and self-represented parties must appear through Zoom for Government in accordance with the court's remote appearance instructions.

## **Party Information**

## **Debtor(s):**

Art and Architecture Books of the Represented By

Thomas M Geher David W. Meadows Jerome S Cohen Carolyn A Dye Alan I Nahmias

### **Movant(s):**

Sam Leslie, Plan Agent Represented By

Victor A Sahn Asa S Hami Carolyn A Dye David J Richardson Steven Thomas Stephen Sorensen